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JESUS' PARTING WORDS OF COMFORT TO HIS DISCIPLES

JOHN 14:1-13

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Jesus, taking leave of his disciples, comforts them by making himself and his mission fully known to them.

To this chapter both simple believers and philosophers turn when they are dying; it expresses perhaps more fully than any other in the New Testament all that Christ is to his people and the relation he has formed for them between this world and the world unseen. It owes its power no doubt in great part to the situation in which the words are spoken. The traitor has gone out into the night, and the hostile preparations are being made outside for the last scenes. The disciples are plunged in grief at the removal of their Master which he has announced to them. Some of them will fail, he says; they will all be forsaken. At this point he addressed them, not with directions and laws and a constitution for his church, nor yet with prophecies of far-off things, but with triumphant declarations of the victory he already feels that he has gained over all evil, and loving exhortations to them to regard his victory as being also theirs. They have not fully understood all that God has sent them in his Son; now he strives to let them understand it, and to lead them to appropriate the height and breadth and depth of the great work. True, Jesus cannot himself have spoken all that is here put in his mouth; it took two generations of his followers to arrive at so complete a view of his person and of the import of his mission; but the insight which found all this in him was not mistaken.

1. *Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God and believe in me!* Jesus' own heart was troubled: at the grave of Lazarus, 11:33; when he saw his "hour" was come, 12:27; when he saw the treachery of Judas, 13:21. But now he has left all weakness behind him and is able to comfort others. The trouble spoken of is that of the impend-

ing separation; the first relief thought of for it is the old one of the prophets and psalmists—trust in God, whose power to help and save is infinite. But to that is added trust in Christ himself, now indeed at the point of death, but soon to be beyond death and every ill, in a position in which he can do everything for his loved ones. Their faith in God is now a richer and more tender thing than that of the Old Testament.

2. *In my Father's house are many mansions (otherwise I would have told you), for I am going to prepare a place for you.* Another rendering is, "Otherwise would I have said to you that I am going?" But the words which would thus be quoted cannot be found, and there is no place for them, as the subject of Jesus' departure has just been introduced. What we have given is the best that can be made of the words as they stand. The idea that Jesus might have told the disciples anything else is scarcely tolerable, and only to be explained from the later standpoint, at which the Christians conclude that if the arrangements in heaven were not what is here stated, Jesus must have said so. What is said is that the object of the journey Jesus is making is to secure the future of his disciples. In his Father's house, he says, there are permanent abodes for many. It is not a place to which one is carried in a vision, to leave it again straightway; it is a place where one can stay and not need nor wish to change. The picture is a very different one from that of the Apocalypse, where there is so much detail of the heavenly region. No more is said than faith requires. If the Lord goes away, he goes on the disciples' errand. The "mansions" may be derived from the apostle Paul's conception of the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Paul no doubt meant by this the spiritual body in which the soul is to continue its existence, but the idea of mansions in heaven might be built on his words.

3. *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.* The great interest of the Christian is secured in these words, that he should not be separated from the Lord. As Gambold says:

For this I do find,
We two are so joined,
He'll not be in glory
And leave me behind.

The parting Jesus has announced is not final; it is "auf wiedersehen." But when is the coming of the Lord, here spoken of, to take place? The earliest Christians thought of the Parousia, the second coming when Christ would descend with armies of angels to enter on his reign. That can scarcely be meant here. When this book was written many Christians had fallen asleep, and found—according to the belief of this gospel—that the believer in Christ though he died yet lived and found in Christ the resurrection and the life. The Fourth Gospel speaks very little of the Parousia, and the coming of Christ to his own here must be at death. When he dies the believer departs to be with the Lord; in death Jesus comes to take him to himself.

4. *And whither I go you know the way.* This reading is best supported. It also gives the best sense, as Jesus has just said whither he is going, and does not need to recur to that. What he may be expected to add is how the disciples may come where he is. His coming for them at death can scarcely take place if they are not in the "way," the right way, to that union with him. As the early Methodists spoke of the "method," so the Christians in the Acts of the Apostles speak of the "way" (9:2; 24:22, etc.). In Gnosticism again, as in Egyptian and other religions, there was much speculation as to the way the soul must take to reach the place of bliss, the ways and formulae which she must use. How to find the way might be a difficult matter. Yet Jesus asserts that his disciples know the way to the place where he is going. Vss. 6 and 7 show what he means.

5. *Thomas says to him, Lord we know not whither thou goest; how do we know the way?* A disciple might have known better than the unbelieving Jews (7:34-36) what the going away of Jesus meant. But even the disciples might not take in all at once all the new thoughts Christianity brought concerning the opening up of the heavenly world. One who dies, however great a being he was, went out of sight, out of reach; where was he, how could one get to him? To the average mind in the ancient world it was far from clear. Thomas uses the word "way" in a more literal sense than Jesus, after the general practice of those who put questions to Jesus in this gospel; but his question is not unnatural.

6. *Jesus saith to him, I am the way and the truth and the life; no one cometh to the Father but by me.* We expect some directions how the way is to be found and its difficulties overcome; but instead of this the plain, short, blunt statement, *I am the way*. It is to the Father that he is the way, to the abode of peace, the end of religion. As he is the living water to the thirsty, the light of the blind, so to the soul that commits herself to him he is the way that leads to God. United with him, one is assured of the right completion of life's journey, of getting home at last. He is also the truth. In the journey his people make with him there are no fanciful deviations, no blind paths to be retraced; their feet are planted on the central reality of things; they have the inner secret of all life and thought, which cannot disappoint them. He is also the life. Much of human existence falls short of life, one is carried along without really living, without any vigorous advance or sense of satisfaction. But in him there is life, life abundantly (10:10).

We touch here the summit of the teaching of this gospel. The evangelist tells (1:18) what those who understood Jesus saw in him; he tells us here of the sense of victory and certainty they felt him to communicate to them. One who takes Jesus as the way is secure against all sorrows and trials, he is full of an impulse which cannot lead him wrong, he is sure of arriving. Here is the consummation of religion, the only one, by which one comes to the Father and is sure of the eternal mansions. What all the sacrifice, the mysteries, the philosophies, promised but could only partly give, what the men of the Old Testament saw afar off, is to the Christian present and certain.

7. *If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; now you know him and have seen him.* Does this imply that the disciples have not known Jesus nor his Father? The harshness is avoided by another reading: If you have known me, you will know my Father also. But the reading adopted reflects the fact that the knowledge grew which the disciples had of their Master and at a certain time was found to yield a new knowledge of God also. The Jews (8:19), though they had Jesus before their eyes, made no such advance; the disciples became convinced that in seeing Jesus they saw God; he was to them the way to the Father. It was about the

time of the death of Jesus that the knowledge began to dawn upon them.

8. *Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us.* The intervention leads like that of vs. 5, to a more explicit statement, and can also be taken in a material sense, as if a palpable theophany were asked for. But on the other hand it may express the general longing of mankind, in that and every age, for some undeniable evidence of the presence of God. Philip in any case had not yet risen to the great truth set forth on every page of this gospel, that in Jesus God has appeared. Not at once did the disciples rise to it.

9. *Jesus says to him, Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father: how dost thou say, Show us the Father?* The seeing God here spoken of is not physical; seeing God in that sense is not for man (1:18); it comes about by faith, as the next verse explains—faith attaching itself first to Jesus and then finding that through him a higher object still is opening to its gaze. When this standpoint is attained the earlier reasonings are seen to be vain; one no longer demands assurance about God which has already come.

10. *Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words I say I do not speak from myself; it is the Father abiding in me that is doing his work.* This is how the conviction grows up that seeing Jesus is seeing God. Jesus who said there was none good but God, could not speak in this way; but the disciples looking back on what they found in him, could conclude that he brought knowledge of God which no one else had, and that he had been entirely true to the knowledge he had of God. He was in the Father, they might say; he was always conscious of God's presence with him and did not desire, as men do, to escape from God; to be with God was what he cared for and clung to, more than anything else. And on the other hand, the Father was in him, a greater than he acted in him and led him forward. In Matt. 11:27 Jesus himself speaks of the intimate sympathy and knowledge which existed between him and the Father. The disciples who saw (1:14) the grace and truth of which he was full, as an only begotten of the Father, naturally drew further conclusions as to his relation to God. Even apart

from a doctrine of Christ's essential divinity they might be led to this.

The remaining part of the verse describes the practical effect of the relation which the disciples can discern between Jesus and the Father. "The words which I speak" is a general description of the activity of Jesus, which consists in bearing witness (8:11), teaching (6:59; 7:14), curing diseases and raising the dead by his word, speaking the word by which men are to live and be free. In all this he is doing as his Father does (5:17, 20). There is nothing self-willed in his activity; it is all the outcome of a higher power than his, as the Father who dwells in him performs his works through the Son, his willing instrument. Those, therefore, who have seen and appreciated Jesus aright feel themselves addressed directly by God, witnesses of God's operations, recipients of the supreme truth.

11. *Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me on account of the works themselves.* Nicodemus believed on account of the works Jesus did (3:2). That is not the highest kind of faith, but it may lead to it (10:38). If one is in the position of the Jews who require a sign (I Cor. 1:22) and cannot yet see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, one may nevertheless be carried along by the works Christ did to believe in the power of the new age, and attach oneself to him who brought it. This no doubt represents the position of many Christians of the first age; and the Fourth Gospel tolerates and even welcomes them.

12. *Verily, verily, I say to you, He who believes in me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father.* The extraordinary success of the church, going out into all the world, casting down the altars of idols, gathering Jew and gentile together in one family (Holtzmann) is claimed as a continuation of what Jesus did on earth, of the works the Father did through him. They are done on a larger scale, in a wider theater, they are growing and to grow no one can tell how far. It is because Jesus has gone to the Father, is freed from the limitations of human life, and can direct things for his followers everywhere with the aid of Almighty power, that all this has come to pass.

13. *Whatever you shall ask in my name, I will do it, that the*

Father may be glorified in the Son. This completes the sentence. The works God did through Jesus go on in the church and need have no limit, since the Christians can obtain anything they ask—in Christ's name. This phrase is used in the New Testament with a variety of meanings. To pray in Christ's name might mean to pray as representing Christ, in connection with his cause, or because Christ prompts us to do so. More likely it means to use Christ's name as an instrument, as a means of appeal to God in prayer. In 16:24 we find the disciples told that hitherto they had not asked God for blessings in the name of Christ, but that they are now to do so. In Acts and in Paul prayer in the name of Christ is not the usage (but see Col. 3:17 and later James 5:14). It is God who is addressed in prayer, but according to vs. 12 it is Christ who does for his people what they ask. The result is that God is glorified, as the Son grants the prayers of his people, and they abound in good works (15:8), prevail over every adverse influence, and are more and more united to the Savior and through him to God: God's purposes are realized and the work he did through Christ brought to its consummation.

Thus the first cycle of the Savior's address of comfort to his disciples has revolved. His removal does not injure but enrich them. They are led by it to deeper thoughts of what he was, to a higher view than they could otherwise have had of what he is and of what as they trust and follow him he will accomplish for them.